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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000197

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS BATTLE FOR YANKARI NATIONAL PARK

1. Summary: Yankari National Park is Nigeria's premier game, bird and plant reserve, but the GON has invested little money to improve park infrastructure or promote park tourism since assuming control of the park in the early 1980s. Park officials told Econoff January 29 that the Bauchi State Government is intent on reclaiming the park and has allocated 1.9 billion naira (USD 14 million) in its 2004 budget for Yankari improvements, while forming a committee to jointly manage the park with neighboring Gombe State. The GON does not want to turn Yankari over to the states, but National Assembly members will likely introduce a bill to return the park to the states and demand that the GON pay Bauchi and Gombe (which were one state before) restitution for lost income since the GON assumed control of the park. End Summary.

Background: Positive Mismanagement?

2. Yankari National Park was established as a park in 1956 and a National Park in 1991, is the country's premier game reserve. It is home to over fifty mammal species, including elephants, lions and leopards, with over 350 bird species and a myriad of fish, reptiles and plant life. Since assuming control of the park in the early 1980s after alleged state mismanagement, the GON has invested little money into park infrastructure (lodging, roads, basic security, fencing), advertising or marketing. Roads have not been resurfaced in over 20 years, park rangers lack vehicles and walkie-talkies, and poaching by local villagers is not controlled. Underdevelopment and lack of visitors has kept much of the park unspoiled, however, with amazing scenery, wildlife and natural hot springs in one of Nigeria's few wild places.

Bauchi State to the Rescue

3. Bauchi State Governor Ahmadu Muazu allocated 1.9 billion (USD 14 million) naira in the state's 2004 budget for rehabilitation of Yankari National Park to include new lodgings, reception area, equipment, security, reintroducing species of wildlife, and strangely a golf course. Muazu has been lobbying the National Assembly to return Yankari to Bauchi and Gombe (which were one state when the Federal Government took over the park), and the two states have formed a committee that hopes to take control of the park from the GON within the next year. Contacts in the Vice President's office told Econoff that the GON has no intention of returning Yankari to Bauchi or Gombe, because the park belongs to the national patrimony.

Cash Cow, But Where's the Cash?

4. The House of Representatives Majority Leader, Alhaji Abdul Ningi, is leading the efforts to return Yankari to Bauchi and Gombe States. Ningi asserted that that the GON should pay the two states compensation for lost revenues since the resort was taken over by the GON. Ningi stated that although Yankari's infrastructure was "in shambles and ramshackled," he claimed the game reserve was making "huge revenue every day."

5. According to Yankari rangers, the park has averaged an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 visitors per year from 1995 to 2000. Low prices in the park have made Yankari one of the best travel bargains in Nigeria, but they also mean the GON has not likely reaped huge revenues from park visitors over the years. Park entrance is only USD 1.25, while lodging (as poor as it may be) is only USD 5 to 75 a night. Meals cost only USD 2 to 3 for lunch and dinner. A 2 hours game drive in the park is a mere USD 2, while a full day in the park with a ranger guide costs USD 10. According to park management, pricing has remained unchanged over the last five years, even with a devalued naira. With limited park revenues and a small federal stipend, Yankari is likely losing money for the GON.

Comment: Yankari's Uncertain Future

6. Kenya and South Africa have adopted two-tiered pricing schemes for local and international visitors, who pay two to three times the rate of local patrons. Nigeria does not get many international tourists, and charges only one rate.

Major hotels in Lagos and Abuja can cost between USD 190 to USD 250 a night, so it is amazing to find such a travel bargain with good service and somewhat adequate facilities.

17. Nonetheless, hope springs eternal for making money in Nigeria, and the GON likely will not give even this skinny "cash cow" back to the states. With proper management and pricing Yankari could easily become Nigeria's premier tourist destination, providing jobs and revenues to the local economy while doing a better job of preservation. Money and management attention from Bauchi and Gombe States would likely help Yankari, at least in the short term.

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